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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Raleigh Field Office
Post Office Box 53726
Raleigh, North Carolina 27656-5726

June 27



Mr. H. Franklin Vick
North Carolina Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
P.O. Box 25201
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611-5201

Dear Mr. Vick:

This is in response to your May 23, 1995 letter requesting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) comments on the proposed widening of US 17 from Jacksonville to New Bern in Onslow and Jones Counties, North Carolina. These comments are provided in accordance with the provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 661-667d) and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1543) (Act).

The attached page identifies the Federally-listed endangered (E) and candidate (C) species that are known to occur in Onslow and Jones Counties. Candidate species refers to any species being considered by the Service for listing as endangered or threatened but not yet the subject of a proposed rule. These species are not legally protected under the Act or subject to its provisions, including Section 7, until formally proposed or listed as threatened or endangered. Although candidate species have no legal status and are accorded no protection under the Act, their inclusion will alert you of potential proposals or listing. Therefore, it would be prudent for you to avoid any adverse impacts to candidate species or their habitat.

The Federally-listed red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) is known to occur in Onslow and Jones Counties. If construction plans include removing pine trees greater than or equal to 30 years of age in pine or pine/hardwood habitat, surveys should be conducted for active red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees in appropriate habitat within a one-half mile radius of the project boundaries. If red-cockaded woodpeckers are observed within the project area or active cavity trees are found, you should contact this office for further information.

Two Federally-listed endangered plant species are known to occur in Onslow County, rough-leaved loosestrife (*Lysimachia asperulæfolia*) and Cooley's meadowrue (*Thalictrum cooley*). Both species are dependent upon some form of disturbance to maintain an open quality of habitat. These disturbed areas provide little competition for light by other plant species. The rough-leaved loosestrife is known to occur in the ecotone between pocosins and uplands, on poorly drained soils, on moist to seasonally saturated soils and on shallow organic soils overlaying sand. Cooley's meadowrue is known to occur in moist to wet bogs and savannas and savanna-like openings on circumneutral soils.

If potential habitat exists for the above-listed species, and the results of surveys indicate that Federally-listed species are located within the project area, the project has the potential to adversely affect Federally-listed species, and you should contact this office for further consultation.